

Making the Calcium Connection

Getting enough calcium is vital for your health. In fact, you need calcium at every age and stage of life. Calcium's key role in your body is to help build and maintain strong bones and teeth. This mineral also helps your blood clot normally and keeps your muscles and nerves working properly. Researchers are currently studying other possible health benefits of getting enough calcium.

Calcium and Bone Basics

From the very beginning of life, calcium is essential for building bone. The amount of calcium you need changes over your lifetime. The chart, *Meeting Your Calcium Quota*, shows daily calcium recommendations for different age groups.

- ❖ **Children and adolescents:** Calcium helps bones grow longer and stronger. Nearly half of your body's bone is formed during the teen years.
- ❖ **Young adults:** During your twenties, you need plenty of calcium to make your bones denser and stronger, even though they aren't growing longer. By your early thirties, your bones have reached their peak bone mass, which is the maximum amount of bone that you will have.
- ❖ **Middle-aged adults:** Your bones begin to lose calcium. If you don't get enough, your body takes calcium from your bones to keep the level of calcium in your blood steady. Over time, bone loss can lead to weak bones that break more easily, a condition called osteoporosis that strikes both women and men.
- ❖ **Mature adults:** As you age, your body is less able to absorb calcium. This is why your need for calcium increases after age 50. For women, menopause also increases bone loss. It's never too late to get recommended amounts of calcium to help slow down bone loss.

Getting Your Calcium

It's not hard to get the calcium your body needs. Here are several ways:



Grilled Chicken Spinach Salad

Meeting Your Calcium Quota

Age (years)	Daily Calcium Recommendations (milligrams)
1-3	500
4-8	800
9-18	1,300
19-50	1,000
51 and older	1,200
Pregnant/ breast-feeding teenager ≤ 18	1,300
Pregnant/ breast-feeding woman	1,000

National Academy of Sciences, 1997

- ❖ **Milk and dairy products.** Aim for three daily servings (2 for kids aged 2 to 8) of fat free or lower-fat milk, yogurt or cheese. These foods are your richest sources of calcium—and they provide a mix of other nutrients that your body needs to stay healthy.
- ❖ **Other calcium-containing foods.** Calcium-fortified foods, such as some cereals, fruit juices, soymilk, bread and cereal bars, are another option. Look for products that say “Calcium Rich,” “Added Calcium” or “Good Source of Calcium.” Some other foods from the five food groups can also contribute small amounts to your calcium intake.
- ❖ **Calcium supplements.** It's best to get your calcium from food, which also contains other nutrients. But if you frequently fall short on servings of calcium-rich foods, consider taking a supplement to boost your calcium intake. See *Supplement Advice* for guidelines on getting the most from a calcium supplement.

Bone-Building Lifestyle Tips

A healthy lifestyle that includes a well-balanced diet along with regular physical activity can help your bones last a lifetime. Along with eating calcium-rich foods, here are more tips to help keep your bones healthy and strong:

- ❖ **Get a daily supply of vitamin D.** Vitamin D helps your body absorb and use calcium. Food sources of vitamin D include fortified dairy products, fish and eggs. Your body also produces vitamin D when your skin is exposed to sunlight. About fifteen minutes of direct sunlight (without sunscreen) per day can give you the vitamin D you need. Older adults are less able to produce vitamin D and may need a supplement.
- ❖ **Be active.** Weight-bearing physical activities help to strengthen your bones. In contrast, being inactive increases bone loss. Walking is one of the best bone-building activities. Aim for at least 30 minutes (60 minutes for kids) of physical activity daily.
- ❖ **Keep your weight healthy.** A weight that's right for your height and frame size is good for your bones.

If you're too thin, your bones may be more fragile. If you cut back on calories to lose weight, be sure not to exclude calcium-rich foods. Getting enough calcium while you are losing weight helps protect your bones.

- ❖ **Be aware of calcium inhibitors.** Too much protein, fiber or alcohol can interfere with your body's ability to absorb calcium—especially if your calcium intake is low. Some foods with calcium, including spinach, rhubarb and kidney beans, contain substances called oxalates or phytates that bind with calcium in these foods so it's not fully absorbed. The effects of caffeine on calcium absorption are small—easily offset by one or two tablespoons of milk in a cup of brewed coffee.
- ❖ **Stop smoking.** Smoking is a risk factor for your bones, as well as your heart and lungs. Smokers have a greater risk for osteoporosis.

Supplement Advice

- ❖ Follow the label instructions. Some calcium supplements are best taken with meals, while others should be taken on an empty stomach.
- ❖ Spread calcium supplements over the day. Calcium is better absorbed in doses of 500 milligrams or less. The safe, upper limit for calcium (the total of food and supplements) is 2,500 milligrams per day.
- ❖ Choose a supplement with vitamin D, if needed. Because too much vitamin D can be toxic, remember to take into account food sources, such as vitamin D-fortified milk, when deciding on a supplement.
- ❖ If you also take an iron supplement, take your calcium at a different time. Each mineral is better absorbed on its own.

Want to add some calcium to your food choices? Give these tasty, easy-to-prepare recipes a try.

Grilled Chicken Spinach Salad

Prep: 25 minutes

- 8 cups torn baby spinach leaves
- 1 lb. boneless skinless chicken breasts, grilled, cut into strips
- 1 cup seasoned croutons
- 1/4 cup KRAFT Reduced Fat Parmesan Style Grated Topping
- 1/2 cup KRAFT FREE Caesar Italian Fat Free Dressing
- Fresh ground pepper (optional)

TOSS spinach with chicken, croutons and cheese in large salad bowl.

ADD dressing; toss to coat. Sprinkle with pepper, if desired. Serve immediately.

Makes 4 servings.

Nutrition Bonus:

Toss together this simply scrumptious main dish salad tonight. The spinach is rich in vitamin A and is also a good source of vitamin C.

Nutrition Information Per Serving: 280 calories, 8g total fat, 2.5g saturated fat, 75mg cholesterol, 960mg sodium, 20g carbohydrate, 2g dietary fiber, 3g sugars, 32g protein, 80%DV vitamin A, 30%DV vitamin C, 20%DV calcium, 15%DV iron.

Exchange: 1 Starch, 1 Vegetable, 4 Meat (VL), 1 Fat

Very Veggie Muffin Melts

Prep: 15 minutes **Broil:** 2 minutes

- 4 whole-wheat English muffins, halved, toasted
- 8 thin tomato slices
- 1 cup fresh mushroom slices
- 1/2 cup broccoli florets
- 1/2 cup red or yellow bell pepper strips
- 1 cup KRAFT 2% Milk Shredded Reduced Fat Mozzarella Cheese
- 1 Tbsp. KRAFT Reduced Fat Parmesan Style Grated Topping

COVER each English muffin half with tomato slice; top evenly with vegetables and cheeses.

BROIL 2 minutes or until mozzarella cheese is melted. Serve immediately.

Makes 4 servings, 2 topped muffin halves each.

Nutrition Bonus:

Try these easy melts for a quick nutritious snack. The whole-wheat English muffin is a good source of fiber, the roasted red pepper is rich in vitamins A and C, and the 2% mozzarella cheese is an excellent source of calcium.

Nutrition Information Per Serving: 180 calories, 5g total fat, 2.5g saturated fat, 10mg cholesterol, 520mg sodium, 25g carbohydrate, 5g dietary fiber, 1g sugars, 12g protein, 35%DV vitamin A, 80%DV vitamin C, 50%DV calcium, 10%DV iron.

Exchange: 1-1/2 Starch, 1 Vegetable, 1 Meat (L)

Dietary Exchanges based on Exchange Lists for Meal Planning © 2003 by the American Diabetes Association and the American Dietetic Association.